

BOARD INFORMATION GUIDE

Senior Enlisted Centralized Selection Boards - How Do They Work?

What do they do?

The Centralized Enlisted Promotion Selection System has been described universally as the fairest most comprehensive selection system in the military. A number of foreign governments have used it as a model for their own promotion systems. It is a system that has passed the test of time and been refined to the point that it is safe to say every Soldier in the zone of consideration receives equal consideration for promotion. The purpose of this article is to provide you an overview of how the selection system works and answer questions that you may have concerning how you can best prepare for promotion.

First, let's discuss just how a board works. There are three selection boards held in Indianapolis annually, the SFC Board, the SGM/CSM Board, and the MSG Board. The mission of each one of these boards is the same - to select the best qualified NCO for promotion to the next rank.

To accomplish that mission the Chief of Staff, Army (CSA) selects a general officer to preside over the board. The general officer Board President is assisted by 11 or 12 full colonels, 7 lieutenant colonels and over 45 CSMs and SGMs who are all selected by HQDA. These senior leaders are broken down by specialty into 11 or 12 panels. Each panel is required to review promotion files of Soldiers from specific career management fields. The board members do not know the number of Soldiers they are selecting until they have reviewed (voted) all the files on Soldiers in the zone of consideration. They do this by rank order, from best qualified to least qualified for each MOS.

OK, that's 'what' they do. Now, how exactly do they do it?

Prior to looking at or reviewing any file, board members are given a comprehensive orientation on the board process, evaluations reports, and detailed written guidance from the Army Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1 and the various branch proponents. The G-1's "Memorandum of Instruction" gives them specific guidance on how to conduct themselves during the board process. The proponents provide specific guidance on the unique qualifications Soldiers should possess to be the most competitive for selection.

With this information and their own experience, the board members determine, as a group, what attributes make a Soldier best qualified for selection using a numbering system from a low of 1 to a high of 6. This set of standards is agreed to by each panel member and is the criteria used to vote each file throughout the board process.

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What then, exactly, do board members use to vote on the Soldier?

The most important document in the promotion file is the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF). Within the OMPF, board members look primarily at each evaluation report, i.e., EERs, AERs, and NCOERs. They generally review all reports and place emphasis on the current grade or the last five years. The board also has access to the official photo, the Promotion Enlisted Record Brief (ERB), a synopsis of previous assignments, and whatever correspondence the Soldier forwards to the board president.

Typically, when a voting member is given a Soldier's record to vote, they first look at the photo to make sure it is recent and in the serving grade. They want to look at the Soldier's appearance and have it in their "minds eye" as they read the narratives contained in the evaluation reports. A photograph speaks volumes. Having no photograph or one that is not in the current grade implies that a Soldier simply does not care about his or her career. Next they review the ERB – this can be a daunting task if it does not compare with the OMPF.

Having seen the photo, looked at the OMPF, and the personnel data, the board member then votes the file based on the standards they set earlier. This is an important point: Your record is voted against the standards set by the members of your panel. That way, the first record voted is graded against the same criteria as the last record voted, and all the Soldiers in the panel receive the same "treatment" as all others.

An equally important point is that even though there are four to eight members on each panel only three of them vote each record. Voters are selected randomly by a computer program. They vote the record independently of each other and are not allowed to discuss the file with any other voting member of the board. Voting members with personal knowledge of misdeeds not reflected in the record are bound to report that knowledge to appropriate officials, but may not divulge personal information about you to other members. In fact, at the beginning of each board, the members take an oath not to do so!

When all the voting is done, then all the Soldiers are rank-ordered from the highest to the lowest score. What determines who gets promoted and who doesn't is specific select objectives provided by HQDA for each MOS. They may only select the number of NCOs for promotion by MOS that the Army projects it will need over the next 12 months. Boards cannot select every NCO that they find fully qualified for promotion. Because of this, competition for promotion can be tough and the condition of your records can make the difference.

The board applies those numbers to the order of merit list for each MOS. The highest scoring Soldiers that fall within the designated requirement are identified as the selects. A series of rosters are then prepared and authenticated, and the list is forwarded to HQDA.

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Preparing for a DA Centralized Enlisted Selection Board

So with that as a background, let's answer the burning question on your mind, "How can I best prepare for a selection board? Based on feedback we have received from board members over the years these are areas you should focus on.

Career: Take the hard jobs and do them well. If you go to a TDA job, get back with troops as soon as possible. Regardless what jobs you have, do them well. The NCOER is the most important document in your file and the one, when combined with your assignment history, that carries the greatest weight.

Take Care of Your File:

OMPF: You have a responsibility to ensure your records are up to date and ready for review by the selection board. If it isn't right you are to blame. With the latest tool OMPF Online the task of getting a copy of your OMPF has been eliminated. Now you can go online and see your actual file, real time. All you need is an AKO account and password to access the OMPF Online website. Go to <https://www.hrc.army.mil>, click on HRC Indianapolis, and then click on the OMPF link. Look at it and compare it to your personal paper files. If it is incomplete, then submit the missing documents as outlined on the HRC Indianapolis website. See your S1/PSB/MPD for assistance.

Official Photograph: Since you cannot appear in person before a centralized board, your individual photograph represents you. The regulation says to have a photo taken every five years or a change in your status. However, if you are serious about promotion get a new photo. No photo in current grade means you have a slim chance of selection. A poor quality photo also can affect your chance of selection. The bottom line - whenever possible, get a new photo for a selection board.

Enlisted Record Brief (ERB): The data information counterpart to the OMPF. You should review and authenticate your Promotion ERB prior to every board. Look carefully at each item on the ERB to ensure the data is there and accurate. Once you are confident that it is correct, then validate it and keep a copy for your records. When you are in the zone of consideration for a board, you can view and validate your Promotion ERB online at the DA Secretariat website.

Memorandum to the President of the Board: Golden Rule, only write a letter if your file is missing something of significance, to point out a current assignment that can not be documented in a NCOER or to explain a particular event in your career. DO NOT write a letter just to tell the board they should select you. Your record will speak for itself. A random memorandum seldom generates a positive outcome. If you have to write remember to be brief, factual, and prepared in memorandum format (AR 25-50). You should only include information that is not contained in your OMPF. Memos must be addressed to the board president and they must include your SSN and signature. Remember memos to the Board President should not be used to express grievances, to

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justify past misconduct, or to boast about yourself. Also, extraneous documents already filed on the OMPF or that are not authorized for filing should not be enclosed. Before mailing, have someone else review your memo for content, flow, format, as well as for grammar and spelling errors.

For more information concerning boards, visit the DA Secretariat web site at <https://www.hrc.army.mil/site/active/tagd/msdsecretariat/enlistedboards/enlistedboards.htm>. Your local S-1 or PSB/MPD will help with questions or problems concerning the update of your records.

Remember, the Army's Enlisted Centralized Promotion/Selection process is fair and equitable. However, the decisions made by these boards are only as good as the information provided to them.

Good Luck!

Start Early For Promotions

Preparation for promotion is an everyday task. The process is affected by how NCOs conduct themselves as Soldiers; how well they do their job; how they approach problems and challenges; how they interact with superiors, peers, and subordinates; and how they seek self improvement.

Soldiers should work on preparing for promotion two grades up, for example, a PFC should be doing the things needed to be ready for the SGT board. Continually work on areas like military and civilian education, improving APFT score, and improving BRM scores. Soldiers should start seeking the tough jobs early in their career and keep doing it. Waiting until the right time or the last minute before a board will be too late.

Soldiers need to work on education from the day they come in the Army, this is important no matter what their career plans are. Taking Army correspondence courses and enrolling in college courses whenever their duties allow. Volunteering for any military training and skill courses that are available also helps. Everything a Soldier does to show their enthusiasm to excel and improve their value and abilities counts for each promotion.

NCOs should strive to be the very best in whatever position they are assigned to. They will receive an NCOER for every position they hold and every report can affect competitiveness.

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The quality of our Army's NCO Corps is extremely high and competition is tough. Unfortunately, everyone that a promotion board finds fully qualified cannot be promoted. The Army can only select and promote the number of NCOs that it needs by MOS, therefore, selection boards are charged with picking the "best qualified" NCOs and this is not an easy task. Each board leaves thousands of very qualified NCOs unselected based on the needs of the Army. Board members themselves wish that they could pick more because of the high quality they see in the records of very deserving Soldiers.

NCOs need to review their Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) regularly. That has been made easy with the advent of OMPF Online. OMPF Online is available to all Soldiers with an AKO account and password via <https://www.hrc.army.mil> and click on HRC Indianapolis. Information on how to review and update the OMPF is provided at the web site. NCOs should review their file carefully to ensure that all NCOERs, AERs, award certificates, and other authorized documents are properly posted. Missing documents should be sent in to update the OMPF. Another item to check is the photograph. The photograph provides board members a visual representation of the NCO so it is important that it be current, that their uniform fits correctly, and that all authorized awards and decorations are properly displayed.

As mentioned, many great NCOs are not promoted each year because of the needs of the Army. NCOs who are not selected for promotion should do a couple of things. First, they should make an appointment with their Command Sergeant Major or Sergeant Major and ask him or her to review their record with them. NCOs should not just ask why they didn't get promoted, they should ask them to point out the strengths and weaknesses in the file and for their opinion on how well their NCOERs have been written over time.

When an NCO has a good file (and most do) and they just ask "Why didn't I get promoted?" The typical answer is "You have a good file and I think you should have been promoted, I don't know why not". No matter how good the NCO's OMPF portrays them, they should ask what else can they do to make themselves more competitive. Something shined brighter in the records of those who were selected. Think about what you have done in the areas mentioned above and strive to improve anything, whether it is education or a tough assignment, to make yourself as competitive as possible. NCOs can also write to their career branch at HRC Alexandria. Again, they shouldn't just ask why they didn't get promoted. They should request an analysis of their records in comparison to their peers that have been selected for promotion and ask them for suggestions that may help make them more competitive. Areas to ask for comparisons in are assignments, duty positions, awards, military and civilian schools, special skills, and any other areas that they can think of to compare. S-1s and PSBs/MPDs have the addresses for HRC's career branches.

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Again, the authorized strength of the Army does not allow boards to select every NCO that is considered "fully qualified" for promotion or selection. Based on Army needs, selection boards can only select those NCOs who are found to be the "best qualified".

DA Senior Enlisted Selection Board Myths and Facts

Myth: It is recommended that you personally visit SRDC to review your Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) because board members are told who came to SRDC to review their records and who did not.

Fact: This myth is false. Board members are NOT told who did or did not visit SRDC. They have much more critical information to review and many important tasks to accomplish. Also, it would be unfair to consider this type of information because the majority of the NCOs considered by a board do not have the opportunity to travel to Indianapolis. Board members want NCOs to review their OMPF and make sure it is accurate. They do not care or know how they accomplished it. NCOs should review their OMPF On-Line at <https://www.hrc.army.mil> and click on HRC Indianapolis rather than drive to Indianapolis.

Myth: There are quotas that each board must meet for the various ethnic categories and for females. Such as, the board had to promote X number of blacks, X number of Hispanics, and X number of females.

Fact: This myth is false. The mission of each senior enlisted selection board is to select the best qualified NCOs for promotion in each MOS - period. Once the best qualified NCOs are identified based on the select objectives provided by DA, the board results are not changed. The board does NOT go back and move anyone up or down on the order of merit list based on ethnic or gender quotas. The mission of each board is outlined in the board's Memorandum of Instruction (MOI) published by Department of the Army. The MOI is available for review along with the published selection list on the HRC Alexandria web site (<https://www.hrc.army.mil>).

Myth: Board members only review the last five NCOERs in each file.

Fact: This myth is false. Board members are provided the Performance portion of the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) that contains all evaluation reports (EER/NCOER/AER), training data, commendatory data, and any disciplinary data that was directed for file in the performance section. While the NCOERs in the current grade or the last five years probably carry the most weight, board members see all reports.

Myth: Board members talk to each other about the records while they vote on them.

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Fact: This myth is false. Board members set specific voting standards within each panel before voting begins using the “whole Soldier concept”. Categories include performance, potential, assignments; military and civilian education; awards; APFT and height/weight; and disciplinary info. Once agreed to and approved by the Board President, these standards are used to vote each file independently under the “blind voting concept”. This means each panel member votes each file against the standards he or she has agreed to and no discussion of records is allowed during this process.

Myth: You will not be considered by a selection board if you have a local flag in effect.

Fact: This myth is false. NCOs who have a suspension of favorable personnel action (FLAG) in effect are still eligible for consideration by senior enlisted selection boards. NCOs who are selected who may have a FLAG in effect are promoted only if the FLAG is favorably lifted.